

# **Fightback**

April 2014

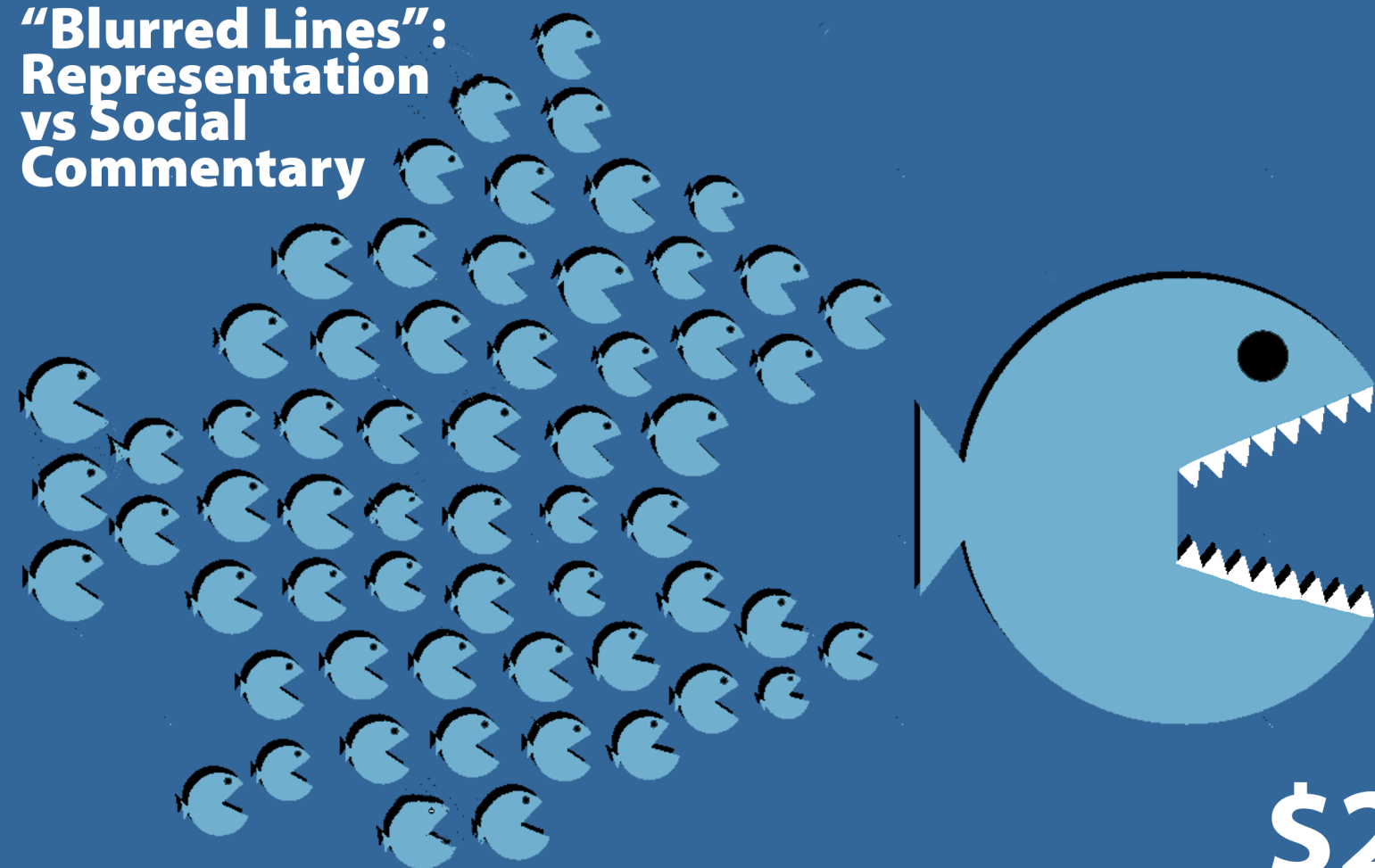
*Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism*

**Revolution vs  
counter-revolution:  
Can the people on  
the streets be wrong?**

**Why socialists need feminism  
& why feminists need socialism**

**Interview: Sue Bolton,  
Socialist Councillor for  
Moreland (Australia)**

**"Blurred Lines":  
Representation  
vs Social  
Commentary**



**\$2**

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Fightback magazine is now in its 20th year as we continue the long-term fight for socialism. Readers and supporters may consider remembering us in their will with assets or money that will help the struggle in the long-term. If this is you please put in your will 'Fightback, PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland' as well as what you would like to leave to us.

Welcome to the April 2014 issue of Fightback (Aotearoa/NZ). Fightback stands for struggle, solidarity and socialism.

In the last issue, Fightback covered the formation of the Internet Party. This party appears to be mainly the plaything of millionaire Kim Dotcom, who has faced repression for breaching copyright law with his online service Megaupload. Fightback concluded that “while progressives may share some common ground with the Internet Party, there is no sign that it represents a progressive force.”

Since that article went to print, MANA entered talks with Kim Dotcom of the Internet Party. Commentators in mainstream and social media quickly portrayed a potential alliance between MANA and the Internet Party as a done deal. However, MANA leadership made no definitive statements, instead saying any deal would have to be approved by the membership.

Fightback participates in the MANA Movement, as a movement seeking rangatiratanga for the poor, the powerless and dispossessed. Dotcom does not have these interests at heart, and simply seeks to advance his own interests; in the past this has meant supporting right-wing politicians includ-

ing John Banks. While we might have unity with Dotcom around some policy areas, Fightback does not support any close ties between the Internet Party and the MANA Movement.

Fightback also opposes MANA entering a coalition government with pro-capitalist parties (p6-7).

If MANA can hold firm to its principles, while also building a base for the party vote and Maori seats, it can play an important oppositional role both inside and outside of parliament. This oppositional role is necessary to forming a long-term movement that can imagine and build a new society, based on principles of self-determination.

## About Fightback

Under our current system, democracy consists of a vote every 3 years. Most of our lives are lived under dictatorship, the dictatorship of bosses and WINZ case managers. Fightback stands for a system in which our workplaces, our schools, our universities are run democratically, for social need rather than private profit.

Fightback participates in the MANA Movement, whose stated mission is to bring “rangatiratanga to the poor, the powerless and the dispossessed.” Capitalism was imposed in Aotearoa through colonisation, and the fight for indigenous self-determination is intimately connected with the fight for an egalitarian society. We also maintain an independent Marxist organisation outside of parliament, to offer a vision of a world beyond the parliamentary capitalist system.

Fightback stands against all forms of oppression. We believe working-class power, the struggle of the majority for self-determination, is the basis for ending all forms of oppression. However, we also recognise that daily inequities such as sexism must be addressed here and now, not just after the revolution.

Fightback is embedded in a range of struggles on the ground; including building a fighting trade union movement, movements for gender and sexual liberation, and anti-racism.

Fightback also publishes a monthly magazine, and a website, to offer a socialist perspective on ongoing struggles.

Fightback stands for struggle, solidarity and socialism.

**Fightback**  
Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

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## The Labour Party and popular participation

*By Ian Anderson, Fightback (Wellington).*

Mainstream media coverage in the lead-up to the General Election tends to focus on fluctuations in polling, most recently an apparent growth in support for National. Left-wing critics of mainstream electoral polling sometimes note that polling relies on landlines, while many poor and disenfranchised people do not have landlines.

That said, many of the same people least likely to have landlines are also least likely to participate in elections. Broadly speaking tangata whenua, young people,

poor people, and recent migrants are the least likely to vote (and have landlines). This effectively means that low turnout is bad for the electoral “left.”

The 2011 General Election saw the lowest voter turnout (by percentage) since 1893, when women first won the right to vote in this country. Voter turnout in general has declined over the last half-century.

Statistics New Zealand have surveyed non-voters’ stated reasons for not voting. In 2011, 43% of non-voters felt disengaged from the whole process (“not interested,” “didn’t think it was worth

voting,” “makes no difference”), while 30% of non-voters cited perceived practical barriers (“overseas,” “couldn’t get to a polling booth”). The largest proportion were simply “not interested.”

For those of us who want to see a truly democratic society, one based on popular participation and self-determination, this all raises a question of strategy. Should we “rebuild” the Labour Party? Should we weave together new organisations? Should we ignore elections entirely?

In 2013, during the contest for the Labour leadership, pro-Labour com-





mentator Martyn Bradbury described the three major candidates as “to the right of Marx – just.” Winner David Cunliffe was particularly touted as representing a “true red” Labour Party. Now some see Cunliffe’s appointment of Matt McCarten, former Unite Union General Secretary, as a confirmation of this move leftwards.

Matt McCarten has a formidable record. As well as playing key roles in the Alliance, the Maori Party and the MANA Movement, McCarten also helped build Unite Union into a fighting force that has waged successful campaigns to raise

the minimum wage, end youth rates (a reform since snatched back), and militantly organise the growing number of casualised workers that the established union movement had neglected.

Party leader Cunliffe’s record is less flash. Cunliffe was a vocal advocate of public-private partnerships in the fifth Labour government. As Minister of Immigration, he oversaw the unjust detention of several Iranian men, fought through a hunger strike and protest campaign. Cunliffe did not oppose sending troops to Iraq or Afghanistan.

So what does this pairing of Cunliffe and McCarten mean for the party? Is Cunliffe radicalising? Is McCarten moving right? What could it mean for a future government? John Key and others described McCarten’s appointment as a lurch to the “far-left.” As with accusations that Obama is a socialist, radical socialists can only respond “if only.”

Pro-Labour commentator Chris Trotter has noted that as Chief of Staff, McCarten will not be mainly involved in formulating policy. Rather, McCarten will act as a “direct and unequivocal promoter of the party’s already agreed goals.”

Pro-Labour commentators argue McCarten’s strength lies partly in his potential to forge unity behind a future Labour-led coalition government. Trotter notes:

“McCarten’s history with the Greens (once part of his old party, the Alliance), the Maori Party and MANA will be of enormous value to Labour should they find themselves in a position to forge a governing coalition.”

Martyn Bradbury also suggests McCarten could extend an olive branch to potential supporters of a Labour-led coalition:

“What Matt can do is reach across to other progressive parties and seriously discuss using MMP

tactically so that the entire Left are united in fighting the Government come election day... If you are a MANA voter, vote MANA tactically. If you are a Green voter, vote Green tactically and if you are a Labour voter, vote Labour tactically.”

Fightback will back the MANA Movement in the upcoming General Elections. With a stated mission of bringing rangatiratanga to the poor and powerless, MANA represents the most progressive section of the working and oppressed majority. MANA maintains the link between indigenous sovereignty and the wider struggle for an egalitarian society.

MANA has not ruled out entering a government with the Labour Party. There is a spectrum of opinion within MANA on entering a government, whether through a coalition or confidence-and-supply agreement.

McCarten for a long time has advocated a strategy of pushing Labour leftwards. Whether this meant building organisations outside the Labour Party, or directly entering a Labour Party government, the orientation was always towards pressuring Labour, with no horizons beyond the two-party system. Taking a job as Chief of Staff within the Labour Party is a continuation of this strategy. This begs the question of whether pushing Labour left, from inside a government, is a viable strategy.

The Labour Party remains a pro-capitalist party. They have some mild differences with National over how to manage capitalism; more socially liberal, more experienced with the public sector, former union bureaucrats rather than former currency traders. However, big business remains the largest donor to Labour; cut the head off the hydra, and another will spring up in its place.

Both Labour and National governments presided over a three-decade decline in real wages. The Labour Party initiated this project of robbing the working

# Labour party/Mana

majority; neoliberalism, or “Rogernomics.” It’s no wonder that poor, young and marginal people are simply not interested in voting.

Chris Trotter argues that “radical constitutional reforms” in the Labour Party over 2012 and 2013 will keep the party leadership honest. These reforms require new policies to fit with the party’s long-established “Policy Platform.”

However, signs at the Labour Party conference in November 2013 were not promising. Moves for transparency on the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) were defeated. The Labour Party also maintains the policy of a \$15/hr minimum wage, as a major flagship policy.

In 2009, Unite Union campaigned for a \$15/hour minimum wage immediately. In 2009, a \$15 minimum wage would have been a step forward for working people. However, inflation quickly wipes out short-term rises in wages. Real wages (wages adjusted for prices and inflation) have declined over the past 30 years.

Unite also demanded that the minimum wage be set to two-thirds of the average wage in future. Labour has not taken up the policy of tying the minimum wage to the average wage. The Campaign for a Living Wage, backed by the Service and Food Workers’ Union, argues for a

living wage of \$18.80/hour.

Now, five years after Unite’s campaign for a \$15 minimum wage, the demand is a lot more conservative. With the minimum wage recently raised to \$14.25/hour by the National government, a wage raise of 75 cents (without any tie to the average wage) would do nothing to reverse the trend of declining real wages. Politicians are often accused of over-promising and under-delivering, but even this promise is woefully inadequate.

A popular meme says that “if voting changed anything, they would make it illegal.” This is a half-truth. Democracy is a product of struggle; including, for example, women’s struggle for suffrage. When electoral work, combined with popular struggle, has challenged capitalism and imperialism, “they” have done their best to make it illegal (Chile’s coup in 1973, Venezuela’s attempted coup in 2002). Elections can work as important sites of class struggle, but most of the time, the ruling class is winning.

Fightback has no illusions that socialism can simply be voted in. Our participation in capitalist elections is oppositional. Even when radicals such as MANA’s Hone Harawira win seats, their role is to support the wider community movement, not to go into

coalition with pro-capitalists.

Sue Bradford, of MANA and formerly the Greens, holds the record for most successful Private Members’ Bills while outside a coalition government. Many of these necessary reforms, such as raising the minimum wage and abolishing youth rates, were backed by community movements. Workers can win the reforms we need, without entering government and sacrificing our independence.

We need transformative strategies, not strategies that simply reproduce the system that got us here. We need to weave together new organisations that can move beyond the existing political structure, from the scraps we currently have.

The Council of Trade Unions remains the largest formally democratic organisation in the country. Although the CTU is currently unwilling to take risks, unions of workers are a necessary part of forging the new movement we need.

Organisations of the people cannot rely on big business, or parliament. We need our own finances, our own democracy, our own structures organised in opposition to the capitalist system. Support for the Labour Party undermines the possibility of liberation for the working and oppressed majority.

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## The 2014 elections and the future of MANA

*The following is excerpted from a document called “Socialist Perspectives for New Zealand” that was part-written by a Fightback member, for CWI Aotearoa/NZ. Fightback broadly endorses the perspectives in the document.*

The MANA Movement provides an important opportunity for reframing a pro-worker and pro-Maori political agenda. MANA was formed in 2011 as a Maori radical and leftist split from the

Maori Party, led by MP Hone Harawira. The split finally took place after the Maori Party, in government with the ruling National Party, supported an increase of the general services taxes which disproportionately impacts on workers and the poor.

Since then the Maori Party has shifted to the right and in many respects has become a circus. Most of the media attention about the Maori Party has been about its leadership disputes. Mean-

while MANA has had a consistent and strong presence on issues such as child poverty (with actions and events around Harawira’s Feed the Kids Bill), asset sales and housing. MANA has been very visible in key industrial disputes, particularly in the meat industry disputes.

Harawira has said “MANA is what the Maori Party was supposed to be – the independent voice for Maori, the fighter for te pani me te rawakore (the poor

and the dispossessed).” MANA plays a good role in local communities and in the parliament. The development of the MANA Party can be seen as an important step in the process of building a mass working class party in the future.

At the moment MANA has democratic space for socialist participation and while its leadership is not socialist it is comprised of many respected class fighters. Its base is almost exclusively working class and there is scope for socialist ideas to take root both inside and outside the party.

Hone Harawira has won the last two elections for the Te Tai Tokerau seat for MANA. It will be important to put other people alongside him in the next parliament as well as developing the party’s structures and its ability to intervene in struggles. MANA came close to winning Waiariki in the 2011 general elections. Its candidate also made a strong showing in the Ikaroa-Rawhiti by-election in mid-2013, gaining 26% of the vote. They lost out to Labour but beat the Maori Party.

As the Maori Party diminishes and MANA develops there is a possibility of MANA establishing a base real base across four North Island Maori electorates of Te Tai Tokerau, Tamaki-Makau-

rau, Waiariki, and Ikaroa-Rawhiti. Work in these areas will become increasingly important in the coming period.

However, the key issue in the long-term for MANA is two-fold. Firstly, it needs to maintain itself as a party of struggle over the long term and not succumb to an electoral focus. The maintenance of a struggle-based approach is always a question for any organisation of the oppressed. It is a question which has to be taken seriously and consciously. Secondly, it needs to be clear that it will not enter capitalist government coalitions.

It is possible that an opportunity arises for MANA to participate in a Labour and Green led government after the next election. The character of this government would be pro-capitalist from the outset. Neither of those two parties have an economic or political alternative to capitalism. While their style may differ to National they too will be forced to adhere to the demands of big business and the finance markets. At the end of the day they will also implement policies that make working people pay the price for the crisis.

In our view if MANA entered into government with those parties it would become trapped or absorbed into a regime that fundamentally represents

the interests of the ruling class. They would be forced to vote for budgets that include cuts and other attacks against the people they are supposed to represent. As was seen with the Alliance a decade ago wrong decisions in regards to coalitions with capitalist parties can destroy small fledging parties.

Some prominent left populists within or aligned with MANA, who do have some influence, are aggressively pushing for a Labour-Greens-MANA government. Some people in other socialist groups who also participate in MANA have similarly encouraged this position by creating illusions in Labour.

In our view it would be a mistake and a distraction from the work of building movements from below for MANA to participate in a capitalist government. Real support and growth will not be built from inside parliament house but from leading campaigns. If MANA avoids entering the traps of government or supporting supply agreements then it is possible that it can play an important role in pushing back assaults on our rights and living standards.

Socialists must warn that MANA is facing the possibility of a real turning point, and that decisions in 2014 can be the key to the party’s future.

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## Interview: Sue Bolton, Socialist Councillor for Moreland (Australia)

*Sue Bolton is a long-time socialist activist and the Victorian convenor of Socialist Alliance. She was elected to the Moreland Council, which covers the inner northern suburbs of Melbourne, in 2012. She will be a featured speaker at the Fightback conference in Wellington in May. She was interviewed for Fightback by Bronwen Beechey.*

**Fightback:** There is a debate in the socialist movement about whether so-

cialists should participate in “bourgeois” elections. Obviously you think they should, why do you think it’s a good idea?

**SB:** I think it is important for socialists to stand for election for several reasons: it gives you a forum for putting a socialist viewpoint on a wide range of issues, not just issues where there are campaigns. In Australia at the moment, campaigns tend to focus on moral issues such as human rights or environmental

issues but there few campaigns around economic issues. Elections give an opportunity to socialists to put an alternative to neoliberalism.

Elections are also a good discipline for socialists because you have to translate your general socialist slogans into concrete policies.

It is a good way of building the party and also a socialist or socialist-leaning milieu or base in an area.





Moreland City Councillor, Sue Bolton speaking at a public rally.

**Fightback:** Do you think that your election was due to the issues that you campaigned around, or your profile as a long-time activist in the area, or both?

**SB:** I think it was both. There are people who know me from the union movement, including picket lines, the refugee rights movement, the Middle East Solidarity group and the climate movement. Some of the residents who didn't know me or Socialist Alliance voted for me because we campaigned to put community need first, not developer greed.

**Fightback:** What were the issues you campaigned around?

**SB:** We took up a mix of local and broader issues. A central issue we campaigned on was opposition to developer greed, for developers to bear the cost of providing amenities, for mandatory height limits and more green spaces. We called for a campaigning council that would campaign for more public transport, against the sell-off of public housing and for ethical investment.

We campaigned for expanded bike paths, solar power and against gas-fired power generation.

We campaigned for a council that helps its residents with cost of living pressures, including that residents not be pushed out of their home because they can't afford rates and that rates shouldn't be increased above the level of inflation. This is because rates are not an equitable means of funding local government services. A pensioner or an unemployed person could be living in a house which has risen in value because of gentrification, but they can't afford massive rates even though their house has risen in value.

We also campaigned for regular ward accountability meetings.

**Fightback:** What has been your experience working in the council? Is it a hostile environment, or do you have supporters there? Have you any formal or informal links with other socialist or left councillors?

**SB:** The council is very conservative with a Liberal Party councillor, a Democratic Labor Party councillor, two Greens councillors, six ALP councillors and me. Then there is the council bureaucracy which is also very conservative.

The council meetings aren't necessarily hostile. It's more that the council bureaucracy and the other councillors are trying to take you on the same path as them, which is a neoliberal path. The problem is more one of co-option rather than direct hostility, although that exists as well.

Due to the pressure of campaigns, we haven't been collaborating as closely as we would like to. I get more opportunities to collaborate with Sam Wainwright [from the Fremantle, WA Council] because he is also a member of Socialist Alliance. I am also involved in a campaign that involves a number of members of [Socialist Party member and Yarra Council councillor] Steve

Jolly's party, the campaign against the East West Link [a proposed 18-kilometre tolled freeway system including two 12-metre tunnels, running through Melbourne's inner suburbs.]

**Fightback:** How has the Abbott government affected Australian politics at a national and a local level, particularly its impact on working people, the poor and oppressed groups?

**SB:** The worst aspect is the Abbott government's use of sharp racism, in particular against refugees, to hide its attacks on working class living standards. The government is appealing to the more conservative section of the working class in order to rule.

At the same time, it is attacking unions by attacking corruption in unions. Unfortunately, a couple of real examples of corruption have been uncovered. These have undermined workers' confidence in unions, which in turn has made the unions more scared about responding with industrial action. Most industrial action is illegal, so the only way of responding to the attacks is with "illegal" industrial action. It is necessary to take industrial action regardless of whether it is legal or not, but most unions are avoiding taking any industrial action that might be deemed "illegal." It's also the case that if unionists or unions refuse to pay fines for taking industrial action, the law allows the government to sequester the fine from individual's or union's bank accounts.

The government has succeeded in demoralising people because people can't see a fightback coming yet.

**Fightback:** Do you think the recent "Marches in March" against the Abbott government represent a new phase of opposition to neoliberal policies?

**SB:** The marches were fantastic, especially given that the union movement

## Why you should get involved in Fightback

### We are revolutionary socialists

We all live in a capitalist society, which means that the working-class majority experience exploitation and poverty in order to guarantee profits and luxury for the ruling-class minority. The capitalists have many weapons at their disposal – not just the army, police, courts and prisons, but a system of ideas, developed over centuries, that shape people's beliefs about what is normal, natural, and possible. These prevailing ideas tell us that we can do no more than tinker with the

current system. However, the current economic crisis shows more clearly than ever that society must be radically reorganised if it is to serve the interests of the working-class majority. To challenge the entrenched power of the ruling class, workers cannot rely on parliament or parties like Labour, which support the existing system. We need to build a movement which can develop alternative, anti-capitalist ideas to create a revolution.

### We support workers' resistance

The fundamental basis of our politics is class struggle. For us, socialism – a society in which the means of producing wealth are owned collectively and run democratically for the benefit of everyone – can only come about when we, the people who produce the wealth, liberate ourselves from capitalist exploitation. Fightback does everything it can to support all workers' struggles – from the smallest work stoppage to a full-on factory occupa-

tion – as these are the basic forms of resistance to capitalist rule. As workers start running their workplaces and industries on their own, they will start to ask, "Why can't we run the whole country – and more?" We take inspiration from historical examples of workers' control such as the Paris Commune and the Russian Revolution, and study their successes and failures.

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hasn't mobilised its members against the Abbott government yet. The size and number of marches undercuts the government's argument that it has a mandate for its cuts. Around 100,000 people marched against the government at March in March. The dominant issue that people brought homemade placards about was the government's inhumane treatment of asylum seekers, followed by climate/environment issues, then many other issues.

**Fightback:** Some on the left argue that the best strategy to beat right-wing governments is to vote for labour parties as the "lesser evil," or that they can be transformed from within. What is your response to those arguments?

**SB:** The left has tried to reform Labor from within ever since the ALP was formed. It's never worked. The only times that Labor governments have ever carried out any progressive reforms are when there has been a strong communist/left movement outside the ALP. In fact, I would argue that the ALP doesn't just play a reactionary role when in government; it also has a damaging effect on unions. The ALP is always influencing unions to not put forward their interests strongly; it is influencing unions not to take industrial action. Unions' affiliation with the ALP is a vehicle for the capitalists to influence the unions. Unions have very little ability to influence the ALP to adopt pro-worker policies, despite their affiliation.

**Fightback:** As a member of Socialist Alliance, what is your perception of the recent breakdown of unity talks between SA and Socialist Alternative? Do you think there are still possibilities for greater unity on the Left?

**SB:** I think there were different conceptions of what sort of organisation we each wanted to build. There were some differences which would have needed

to be explored before unity could have been possible, but there was never an opportunity to do that before the unity talks broke down.

However, there's always another struggle and another day. There will be opportunities in the future for left unity but these opportunities will probably arise as a result of new political developments.

**Fightback:** As a long-time feminist, do you think that there are still difficulties for women participating in mainstream political bodies such as councils? Have you experienced sexism from other council members, or from the community?

**SB:** There have definitely been sexist attitudes exhibited by a couple of male councillors. On Moreland council six of the eleven councillors are women. I might have experienced more sexist attitudes if the numbers were different. The problem is more that the council and councillors are good on women's rights issues on paper but in practice they only pay lip-service.

The real issues of sexism come about at a much earlier stage and are more to do with women's ability to participate in society because they face family violence, are living in poverty on single parents pension or a low paid job as a single parent, don't have the money to access expensive childcare or other services, or have low self-esteem.

You can also see a certain sexist approach with the murder of a local Brunswick woman by a male stranger on the street towards the end of 2012, which resulted in a big Reclaim the Night march of several thousand people. The council turned this issue into a law and order issue, rather than dealing with it as an issue of violence against women. The biggest source of violence against women is from intimate partners in the home.

**Fightback:** Some left-wing councillors and former councillors have commented that the relatively privileged role of a councillor (getting free passes to events, socialising with business people, etc) can influence progressive councillors and distance them from their constituents. How do you stay accountable to the community?

**SB:** That can certainly happen. You have to be very conscious about what you're on the council for. Unlike state and federal government, councils are portrayed as being a "team" where party politics and an oppositional approach don't apply. This is all part of trying to recruit all councillors to "respectable" neoliberal politics.

It's important to be aware of the fact that many of the councillors and council officers regard residents as pests, and use language to cover up the pro-business outlook such as talking about all the "stakeholders" as having equal interests. This is a way of legitimising giving more say to businesses and developers than to residents.

The accountability is mainly via report-backs on council activities on Facebook and the blog site (<http://www.suesmorelandreport.org>). In addition to this, I report back to Socialist Alliance meetings and we initiated Moreland Socialists for anyone who is left-wing and wants to support our council position. We have organised some ward meetings, but we want to get more regular with these.





## Why socialists need feminism and why feminists need socialism

*A Socialist Feminist 101 talk given by Kassie Hartendorp, member of Fightback (Te Whanganui-a-Tara) on International Women's Day, March 8th, 2014.*

This talk was originally given as the first part of a Socialist Feminist Day School held by Fightback in Wellington/Te Whanganui-a-Tara on International Women's Day, March 8th, 2014.

The day began with everyone discussing what they thought of socialism and feminism as concepts, and whether they identified as socialists or feminists. This talk followed:

Often we can't use the term socialism, without explaining the term capitalism. Capitalism is generally understood as a system that is based on the growth of private profit. Under capitalism, the means of creating goods and services are owned by a small minority of people, and sold to make a profit. In simplistic terms, those who do not own a business or company must work for someone else to earn money in order to live. We find

ourselves needing to work long hours in jobs we often don't really like, to pay for food, rent, bills, the list goes on. For those who aren't able to work, due to sickness, disability or a lack of jobs, we rely on a substandard allowance from the government, known as the benefit, social welfare, the dole. Even if we can't work, cannot find work, or don't want to work, there is a constant pressure to be in paid work, whether socially or to make ends meet.

The logic of capitalism, is to make a profit, is to continue reproducing capital. We can see how this works at a very basic level. Say you make shoes for a living. Every day, you go to the local factory and make designer Crocs. It's a hard life cause everyone hates what you do, yet you know there's a core group of gardeners and chefs in the world who probably have a lot of respect for your work.

Now in one hour, you can make 20 pairs of crocs and get the minimum wage of \$14.25 an hour. It's not much, but you

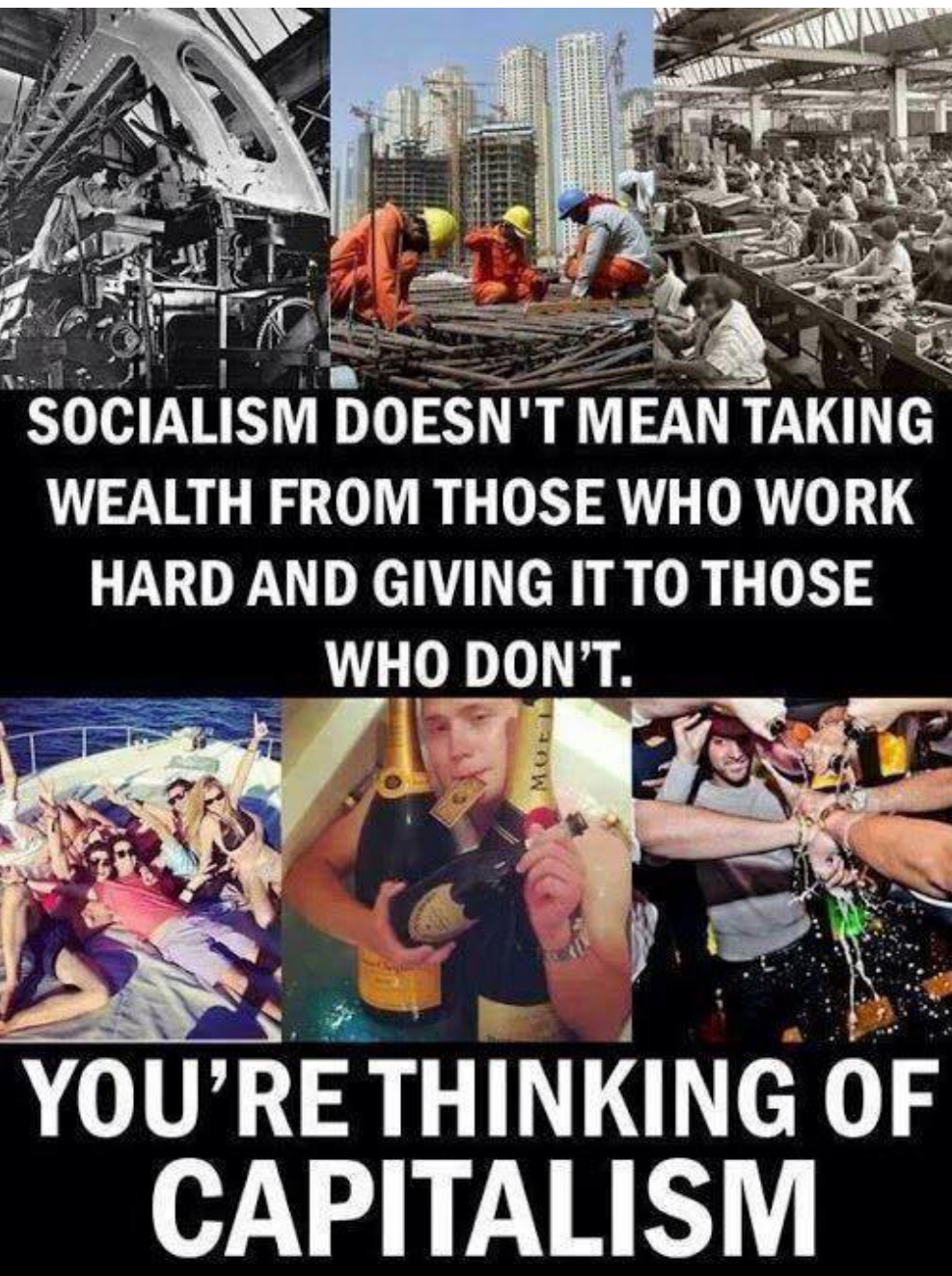
have a passion, right? Each Croc you put into the world costs about say, \$10 to make including the use of equipment and shipping, and costs \$40 down at the Warehouse or wherever. So in one hour, you've technically created \$600 worth of Croc profit in your 20 shoes. If every one of those shoes were bought (heaven forbid), your factory owner might have earned a few hundred dollars. But what you've taken home is \$14.25.

The gap between the costs spent and the price it has been sold for is known as "surplus value." It's the value that you have created, but the profit from it goes to a boss, or owner of a company, rather than back to those who have spent the time in the factory, doing the work. Socialists argue that this makes capitalism an exploitative system, as it is making profit for private owners (known as the capitalist class) from the workers, or the working class.

It's worth spending some time thinking about the jobs you have worked, what wealth has been created, and how much



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of that wealth you really see in your pay cheque at the end of the week. Other jobs are more obscure, such as service, community and public sector work and some work for themselves rather than big companies, but the logic of capitalism still rules everything around us.

Capitalism isn't just about the world of economics, but should be seen as a social relation. The ability to accumulate vast amounts of wealth off the majority of people for private profit has led to great social inequality. The gap between the rich and the poor grows ever wider, and this can be noted here in Aotearoa with one in four children living below

the poverty line, but also internationally with the rise of wealthy nations over super exploited countries. When the capitalist class needs more capital, it simply keeps moving on to nations that it can exploit even more. This process is known as imperialism, and still continues today in the search for cheaper workers, to pump up profits. The logic of capitalism, and white capitalism, says that any place in the world is there to colonise, regardless of the nations, cultures and communities that already inhabit those countries.

Capitalism also affects how we see and understand each other, as well as

how we see and understand ourselves. It relies on a mass amount of workers who need to sell their labour, their time, yet makes sure the job market is always tight, which increases competition. People who have low wages and poor conditions are less likely to speak up about their workplace if there are no other jobs to go to. The capitalist class has a lot to benefit from us remaining silent and divided as workers, as students, as migrants, as beneficiaries and blaming each other rather than looking at the roots of the cause.

While oppression such as racism and sexism have existed in class society before Western capitalism, as we know it now, our current system has shaped it into new forms, deepening social divisions and allowing for power structures to remain in place that fail people of colour, women, older people, LGBTIQ folk, those with disabilities, as well as in general, the sick, the poor and people with mental health experiences. The only people that capitalism really benefits are the elite 1% who are able to access and be in control of vast amounts of capital.

A system that is built on selling things, constantly, hugely informs the way we live, and the things we prioritise. We end up relying on public funds from our taxes to take care of basic social welfare and support as well as building infrastructure, law and policy and deciding on national goals. But we ourselves have very little input into what is done with the money, and it's pretty normal for politicians to lie and go back on promises.

As well as this, research funds are usually only available in areas where there can be a viable market. The media is owned by gatekeepers that often reinforce and perpetuate myths and negative stereotypes. The revitalisation of trampled or colonised cultures and language is less of a priority, yet those cultures are fine to be turned into a commodity if a Government decides that it can be used to base a tourist

campaign on, for example.

At a basic level, how do we negotiate our own sense of self when we don't have the resources to be able to do this? There are industries based on making money from our "self-improvement." Would the cosmetics or diet industry still be making massive profits every year if we were told from birth that how we looked was actually pretty great, and we don't need to rely on purchasing items that would gain us the social status we need to excel in a competitive environment?

Phew, it all looks pretty fucked, right? At its core, capitalism's priorities are to create more capital, free up markets, and allow for more wealth to be able to flow into private hands. But this creation of wealth is based on exploitation.

Socialism however, is a system based on fulfilling human need. It is a system where individuals and communities have the means to really be able to control their own lives. And not in a way that is based on individual freedom like ideas put forward by libertarians, but collective freedom that works in the interest of the majority.

Socialism means putting the control of the means of production, our factories, our workplaces back into the workers' hands through the process of socialisation. The wealth that is created goes back to the workers and to society, rather than all of the surplus value going straight into the owner's pockets or offshore bank accounts. The power to decide how the wealth is distributed would lie in the hands of workers and communities, and would be planned on a national basis, and coordinated internationally. In a system that is based on human need, and has control of the wealth and resources, we can begin to seriously address issues such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness and social inequality.

Socialists believe that it's not possible to just tinker with and improve capitalism, but there needs to be a complete trans-

formation of our economic, political and social system through a social revolution. There is no exact plan or script for how a revolution would take place or what a socialist world would look like, as it would depend largely on the people, communities and societies creating it.

But there would be basic priorities under socialism, such as establishing a more democratic decision making structure involving the voices of workers and communities. For example, after the Cuban revolution, they established people's committees, trade unions, women's and student organisations to help govern the country. Workplaces put together proposals on national plans and had a say in their own laws or policies affecting them. Education and healthcare were made completely free and available to everyone. The future of Cuba was put in the hands of the people.

While profit is the main motive as it is now, we create waste. We waste time making products or creating services that aim to make money rather than working for a real social need. Imagine how many less products we would need, if everything was made to last as long as it said it would on an infomercial? If big companies weren't relying on us to buy the new edition of the new thing every few months? If we planned our market and our economy wisely, rather than just leaving it to creepy, invisible hands?

Socialism would create the conditions where we could begin to use that spare time and wealth to address issues such as poverty, meaning more people would be able to survive and have meaningful and enjoyable lives. It's about imagining what we would have the time and resources to create when we don't need to work 40+ hours a week making money for someone else. More people would be able to focus on activities and areas that don't create wealth, such as arts, literature, music, research and working on projects that genuinely benefit people and the environment around us.

I will note here that Marxists see socialism as the transitional period in

attempting to construct communism. Communism, while having a pretty bad rep, is understood by Marxists as the aim of a classless and stateless society, operating on the principles of "from each according to ability, to each according to need." Under communism, the need for a government wilts away as people govern themselves through more effective mechanisms. Some people use the terms socialism and communism interchangeably, as both refer to a process of collective ownership.

Now feminism is not, in essence, mutually exclusive to the ideas of socialism. A feminist is generally understood as someone who recognises that women face oppression based on their status as a woman, and works to fight against this. Feminists use the term patriarchy, which often refers to the overarching system and social mechanisms which allow for the dominance of men over women. From a socialist feminist perspective, Heidi Hartmann has defined patriarchy as men's control over women's labour (which is largely unpaid, such as housework, childcare and so on), and is maintained through the sexual control of women's bodies.

Intersectional feminism acknowledges that people can experience oppression on many levels, and how these oppressions interact. For example, how a white, able-bodied cis woman's experiences of sexism may differ to how an older queer woman of colour, or transwoman with a physical disability, experiences sexism, and what that means in terms of how we orientate and organise against oppression. Sharon Smith claims that the first real talk of intersectionality was by Sojourner Truth in 1851 with her speech, "Ain't I a Woman", which refuted the claim that all women's experience of sexism was the same, particularly when it came to the oppression of black women.

Kimberly Crenshaw writes in her key piece on intersectionality, *Mapping the Margins*, that when one discourse fails to acknowledge the significance of the



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other, the power relations that each attempt to challenge are strengthened. Here she is talking specifically about anti-racist and feminist ideas, but it can be related to many other discourses, and I think is true when it comes to socialism and feminism,

## Why socialists need feminism

There is a rich history of socialists and feminists bringing their ideas together, either by working as socialist feminists which is known as a strand of political thought in itself, or working in joint campaigns and actions.

Engels theorised extensively on women's oppression, linking it up with the rise of class society and the nuclear family as an individual unit that relies on monogamy and the passing down of land and property through the males of the family. He discussed issues such as sexual and domestic violence and how they were built into this conception of the family. Around the same time, German thinkers such as Clara Zetkin and August Bebel were writing about women's oppression and its relationship with capitalism. Their work is still very relevant today.

Inessa Armand, the first leader of the women's department of the 1917 Russian Revolution, once said "If women's liberation is unthinkable without communism, then communism is unthinkable without women's liberation."

The Third International, an organisation of communists initiated in 1919 recognised the importance of struggles by women around every question ranging from the right to divorce, to equal pay, to abortion, to communal kitchens and laundry services socialising domestic labour. They made it mandatory that every section of the International develop a program of demands and an orientation toward winning the leadership of mass struggles by working women, and integrated this into their work towards

the struggle for power.

The October Revolution in Russia made the conditions to be able to drastically change the social situation, not just on an economic basis. Under Lenin's rule, free abortion was available on demand; homosexuality was decriminalised, dining halls, laundries and day-care centres were established, and the new regime sought to ensure equality of economic opportunity in the civil service, in industry, in the party and in the armed forces. A lot of these changes were far ahead of the "advanced" capitalist countries at the time, and many still to this day, despite Stalin going on to change many of these laws back.

Socialism is about the liberation of all humankind, and has recognised the particular ways that capitalism oppresses women. However, I'm not claiming that socialism has always been perfect in terms of their theory and practice. Founding Marxist texts are still a product of their time, and have used antiquated terms and sometimes backwards ideas around sex, gender, race and ethnicity. There has been a lot of critique of "bourgeois feminism" which has often led to the dismissal of key feminist ideas, or to relegating racism and sexism as secondary to the class struggle. Many Western socialist groups have remained dominated by white, straight men, and perpetuated the same power structures that we aim to fight against. Some have directly perpetrated sexual violence against women and worked with others to cover this up and shut down debate.

Socialism needs feminism, and an intersectional feminism at that, because any way that we theorise or organise, needs to be based on the liberation of all, not just through a narrow lens, that keeps on producing damaging power structures. One socialist feminist writer says that while Marx didn't write about intersectionality as we know it today, he did speak in similar terms when saying: "But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the

social relations." Marxism and feminism have not always been mutually exclusive ideologies, and key feminist ideas have in fact been discussed and developed by Marxists over the centuries.

Marxism and socialism need to remain living, moving and evolving ideas. They need to take the lead from the input of all women, of all people, to be able to determine priorities, tactics and strategies forward. This means, as Teresia [Teaiwa, speaker at event] actually put it in a conversation last week, that we need to be having conversations and bouncing ideas off each other in order to illuminate the blind spots of our ideas or practices.

## Why feminists need socialism

Feminists also need socialism because the liberation of women is so deeply intertwined with the struggle against capitalism. According to UN gender reports women perform 66% of the world's work, produce 50% of its food and earn only 10% of its income. They own just 1 percent of the world's property. Modern capitalism has shaped, defined and strengthened women's oppression. It has relied on the domestic labour of women having children, bringing them up, taking care of the household and looking after the sick and elderly, and who often have the double burden of this unpaid work, as well as holding paid jobs at the same time. The social inequality and poverty often hits women the hardest, particularly in over-exploited countries. Popular feminist theory such as intersectionality theory provides a nuanced framework that describes different experiences of oppression and how they overlap and conflict. But depending on how you use it, it doesn't explain how this occurs or provide us with the means to fight this oppression. Class isn't just another form of oppression, (such as when people use the term classism) but the underlying way our society is organised and exploited. Class analysis begins

to give us the tools to be able to affect change. It's not about leaving behind our feminist demands, but grounding them in ideas that acknowledge how capitalism works against women, and that we can fight oppression and exploitation at the same time. We have seen that we can make small changes to the current system that may allow for wealthy, white, straight women to access power, resources and better lives but there will always be people being left behind while capitalism remains.

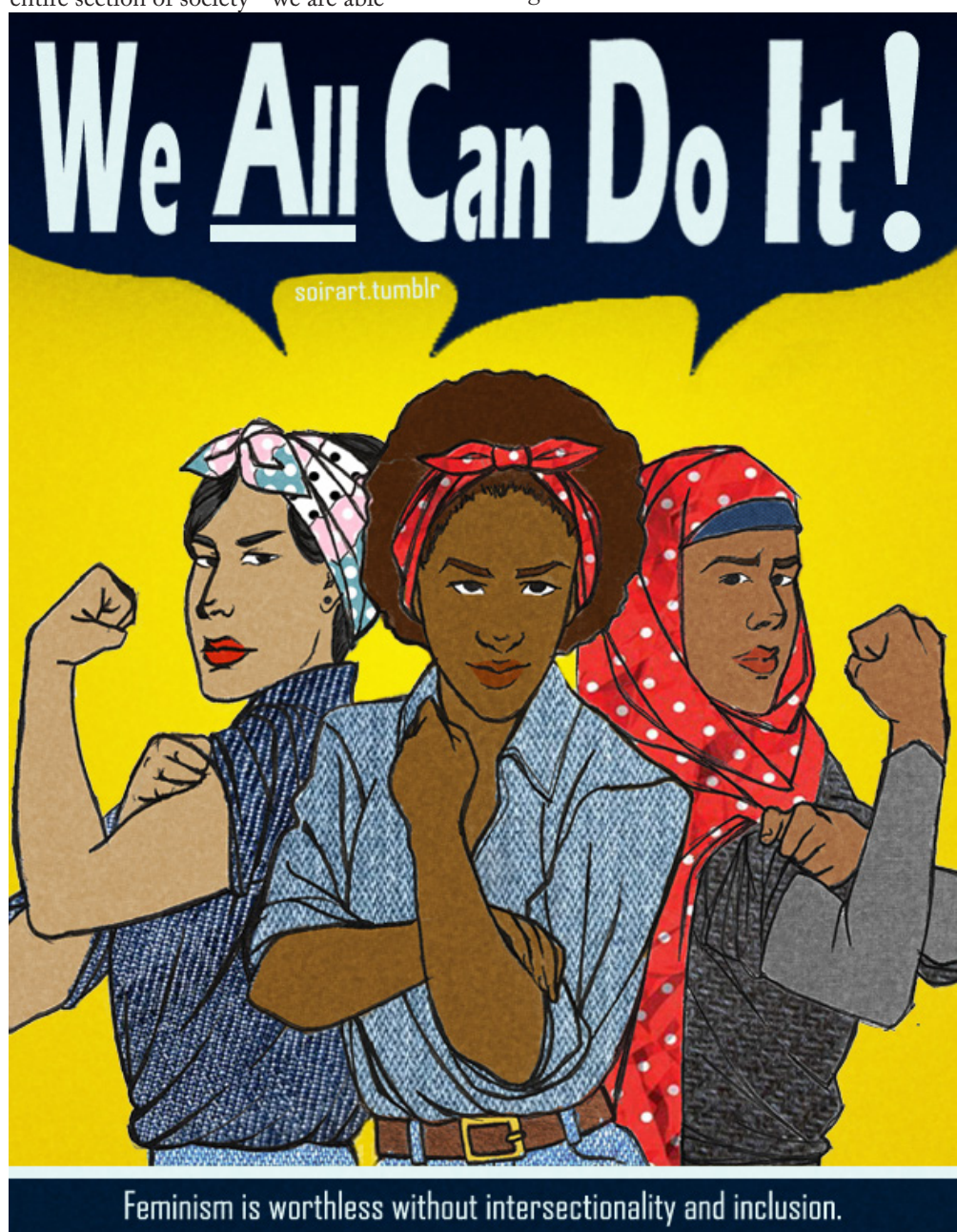
Back on intersectionality theory, I think the way it is often used begins from the premise of the individual, and can end with individual answers or action. We can very easily fragment into our own specific oppressions, and for very good reason. Time needs to be spent on addressing the intersections of oppression, queer women of colour need to come together, same as transwomen with experiences of disability, as examples. But the answers can't always end up fragmented and individualised. It's ineffective, and actually, it just contributes to us personally bearing the weight of systemic oppression. Socialism is based on collective struggle. It acknowledges that the problems are structural and collective, and that the answers are structural and collective.

As a mini example, when I agreed to do this talk, I mentioned that as a woman, I often feel like I have to hold a room, to pay attention to peoples' feelings, to mediate and respond and so on. I feel the pressure to accommodate people, make them welcome, look after them; make sure they're fed and happy. I believe this is something I have been taught from a young age, and that I feel as a social pressure. So I asked that the dudes in the group take the responsibility of preparing and sharing the food, and checking in on people, so that I could focus on the work of delivering political content. I believe this is one way of how an intersectional group can work collectively. Acknowledging the way women may be socialised to act or

think, the way this can oppress women or create gendered work divides, then coming together to work out a solution which at the end of the day, has created an event focused on women's oppression, but not leaving all the responsibility up to women, who then feel too tired and drained to hold the next meeting.

A class analysis or socialist perspective is not just about theory. It provides extra tools to be able to make change. Socialists recognise the power that the working class holds - yes, the bosses may hold the authority, but the workers hold the real power. When we choose to stop working as a group, as a workplace, as an industry, or better yet, as an entire section of society - we are able

to wield our power and hit the owners of the production where it hurts the most. We are able to make real gains, and with enough buy-in and momentum, we can make decisive action that echoes across society. Imagine if we had an intersectional union movement that was mobilised to wield that power in solidarity with oppressed groups at any point. We need to be applying our feminist frameworks to our modes of dissent and action, but as feminists we also need to be thinking collectively. Where can we work together, and build alliances? What women are we directly benefiting when we prioritise struggles? What power can we tap into, to allow for the greater liberation of all?





# Feminism

## “Blurred Lines”: Representation versus Social Commentary.



Article submitted to *Fightback* by Sion-  
ainn Byrnes, University of Canterbury  
Feminist Society (UC Femsoc).

As a sixth-year student at the Univer-

sity of Canterbury, I often find myself  
wondering whether I am completely  
out of touch with reality. Whether years  
of socialization within the Ivory Tower  
have caused me to unreasonably textual-

ize everything I see – I am an English  
student, after all – and thus take critical  
issue with it accordingly. However, the  
absolute, and might I say absolutely  
justified, furore that has emerged in the



wake of the University of Canterbury Students Association's most recent attempt to do justice to the student services levy (which has now risen to \$725.00!) has led me to believe otherwise – has, in fact, bolstered my belief that the “student mass” is not only more discerning, but more “cultured” than would be implied by countless articles about burning couches.

Though I have never attended a Toga Party, I am socially aware enough to know that said Toga Party is effectively a keystone within the annual debauchery that is O-Week. I have no issue with this event occurring – I'll admit that I love to don a poorly-constructed costume – and yet this year I, and many others, have been left red-faced, not by the Toga Party itself, but by the manner in which our student representative body – the UCSA – has chosen to frame and promote this event.

The poster for the 2014 UC Toga Party features an almighty Zeus, appropriately phallic lightning bolt in hand, grinding against a twerking Medusa – tongue out, foam-fingered, Miley-style. It is a decidedly blatant reference to the “twerking incident” that occurred at the 2013 VMA awards, no less to the soundtrack of Robin Thicke's “Blurred Lines”. Now, I am of a feminist persuasion wherein I would like to refrain from commenting on the so-called moral implications of Miley Cyrus' overt sexualisation – Dog forbid a woman should appear to be a sexual creature! (Random sarcastic aside: Because we all know that one woman's actions invariably speak for all women!) What I would like to focus on, however, are the implications of a poster that appears to make light of, and exploit for capital gain, a song that glamorizes and condones non-consensual – even violent – sexual activity.

“Blurred Lines” has been banned from over 20 universities in the UK alone. Hear that! Its deeply misogynistic lyrics have sufficiently turned off that many “learned institutions”, whose purported goal it is to educate citizens about

(obviously amongst other unfortunately neoliberal things) the political dynamics and power structures that underline normative social discourse, that it is actually *not allowed* to be associated with the official events organised by these universities. And yet the UCSA, which we may as well call the UC given its lack of financial independence and thus spine, sees fit to use this imagery and these ideas in order to promote an event that, for many first-years, heralds the beginning, and overall tone, of what it means to be a student. How's that for world-class, Rodd.

Putting aside the very grave fact that, within a week of this advertising being made public, two men were jailed for a sexual assault that occurred within the UC halls – in itself something that should have immediately compelled the UCSA to pause for thought – there are essentially two fundamental points of contention that underscore this whole issue: 1) that the kind of culture reflected and engendered by this poster was deemed appropriate under the UCSA's self-imposed standard of “responsible and ethical decision-making”, and 2) that because the UCSA has been rendered impotent – in effect if not in actual practice – by a neoliberal rhetoric that ensures it functions according to the values of investment and gain, it is actually incapable of representing the interests of students where they breach those of a standard business model: it would appear that sex (even the non-consensual type) sells.

This inability to adequately represent diversity and/or anything that exists outside of the dictates of legitimate top-down, bottom-line discourse is nothing new, of course. The sustained erosion of local democracy within Christchurch has become a constant bane to those who are struggling to reclaim some sort of narrative identity; to those committed to envisioning and enacting a more egalitarian society. Which brings me back to representation.

Does this poster represent survivors of

sexual abuse? Does it represent adult students? Does it represent the \$40,000+ student loans of those individuals, who, like me, are attempting to democratise the luxury of education in order to create new spaces for creative and radical dialogue and action – or to at least trying to make that luxury work in tangible terms for our wider communities. Does it represent the 200+ members of UC FemSoc who, despite paying their student services levies, were made to jump through hoops in the process of obtaining affiliation as a society? Similarly, does it represent the students whose entire degrees have had to be restructured as a result of ever more draconian (and disproportionately arts-based) budget cuts? (You'll have to excuse my repetition here). Does it represent the lecturers who are often picketing outside Council Chambers? And does it represent those potential students that the UC so eagerly wants to engage? The answer is no, because in the UCSA's own words, this poster is not representation – it is “social commentary”. And that is the other blurred line we should be worried about.

You'll notice that I mentioned UC FemSoc above. For me this is one of those gleaming silver linings. UC FemSoc is an inclusive, intersectional feminist society that aims to create a forum for feminist discussion and activism. I am proud to say that as a group we host public lectures, screen documentaries, and have launched a killer zine entitled *What She Said* which brings together articles, artwork, poetry, and resource reviews all aimed at promoting and expressing the creative and diverse experiences and voices of women, non-binary individuals, and those who generally oppose the limiting social constructs of male and female and all that that entails. With the support of academic staff, students, and local communities, UC FemSoc is actively part of a larger movement, one that is attempting to reinstate the role of representation within our universities – because social commentary just isn't enough.

# Protest report

## Anti-racists outnumber white supremacists in Otautahi



*By Fightback reporters.*

Over a hundred anti-racism protestors clashed with white supremacists led by Kyle Chapman in Christchurch on March 22.

Despite an attempt at tricking the counter-protesters by changing at two hours' notice the advertised location of the white-pride rally from New Brighton to Cathedral Square, over a hundred counter-protestors surrounded and outnumbered the 50 or so white supremacists, who were quickly drowned out by

the chants of the anti-racism protestors, a number of whom had come from Dunedin, Wellington and Auckland to show solidarity with Christchurch anti-racist activists.

Counter-demonstrators chanted "immigrants are welcome here, racists are not."

"The fact the racists need to hide their rally is a victory for us, and that they were stopped from preaching their hate" said Fightback member Ben Peterson.

Eventually the police had to escort the outnumbered white supremacists out of the square for their own safety.

"Obviously racism still exists, so it's good that we stood up and shut them down today, however chasing the white supremacists out of town doesn't end racism, it's much deeper than that in our society, we need to keep fighting to root it out," said Fightback member Wei Sun.

Over the course of the rally, organisers held a collection to raise money for the Refugee Council of Canterbury.



## Stop the TPPA: Wellington protest report

By Joe McClure, *Fightback* (Wellington).

On the afternoon of Saturday March 29, protests took place around New Zealand against the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) currently going through Parliament.

In Wellington, this consisted of a march from Cuba Street to the steps of Parliament. Around 200 people gathered at the Bucket Fountain, listening to representatives from the Council of Trade Unions, Victoria University economics department, and the MANA party, who discussed what the agreement is about and who it favours.

Protestors marched from Cuba Street to Parliament, chanting slogans including “TPPA? No way! We’re gonna fight it all the way!” and “Whose streets? Our streets!”

Outside parliament, security staff blocked access to the designated assembly area, where the CTU had arranged for a PA system to be set up, so marchers gathered in the grassy area next to that section instead.

MANA leader Hone Harawira addressed those present, emphasizing the unequal advantage the TPPA provides to member states and punitive effects on non-members, and reminding voters to take a stand for fair treatment of all trading partners, rather than supporting the secret negotiations that have characterised TPPA planning stages.

Protestors from Parihaka in Taranaki also attended, encouraging marchers to reject the intended agreement, before switching to Maori protest songs as the crowd gradually dispersed.

### Why do we oppose the TPPA?

The TPPA affects both trade between countries, and the operations of multinational companies within countries. It overrides internal legislation if a signatory introduces legislation that hurts the economic interests of another country. For example, plain packaging of cigarettes could be overturned as it undermines the profits of tobacco companies, or environmental legislation annulled if it adversely affects an oil corporation (thus making it harder to stop projects like deep sea oil drilling). The agreement involves reducing trade tariffs by 90% by 2009, and completely removing tariffs by 2015. It would

entitle US drugs corporations to override Pharmac regulating the sale of pharmaceuticals in New Zealand, and enable parties to the agreement to protect intellectual property violations in other countries party to the agreement.

Such measure will benefit multinational corporations (such as Fonterra in NZ), but will hurt working class people in signatory states. It will make it harder for people to fight and win legislative changes that protect working-class communities, and instead strengthen the hand of corporations in their drive for greater profit.



Protest MC James Nokise addresses the crowd.





## Revolution vs counter-revolution: Can the people on the streets be wrong?

Senator John McCain (AZ) shares the stage with Ukrainian neo-Nazi leader Oleh Tyahnybok in Kiev.

*By Daphne Lawless (Fightback, Auckland).*

In the words of British journalist Paul Mason, it seems that “it’s all kicking off everywhere”. Across the world, sustained mass protests and occupations of public space are shaking and even toppling governments. Most famously, months of protests and occupations of the public square in Kiev, capital of Ukraine, forced President Viktor Yanukovich to resign and flee the country. Surely “the people” rising up against the government is a good thing... right? Like the Occupy protests of a couple of years ago?

Actually, from a socialist point of view, there’s a universe of difference between the protests and uprisings which we’ve all heard about on the news – Ukraine, Egypt, Venezuela, Bosnia, Thailand and others. It’s never as simple as “the people” versus “the government”.

### Class versus class

Populism is a term used to describe political action taken in the name of “the people” – vaguely defined as anyone who’s not in power at the moment. The thing is, “the people” don’t have many things in common with each other, except for not liking whoever’s in power right now. It includes the upper-middle class as well as the very poor, people with racist and sexist beliefs as well as women and ethnic minorities, homophobes as well as queers.

This becomes a problem since the issue with protests and uprisings is not so much getting rid of the current government, but what you’re going to replace it with. And that question is based on which social force – or class – is most powerful when the old government collapses.

Marxists uses “class” to mean a set of people who have a certain function in

the economy, and thus have the same interests in how the economy is run, who gets how much to do what, and who owns things. While there are many different classes in a modern economy, the two most vital are the capitalist class – those who own big corporations and farms and employ people – and the working class – who can only live by getting a job from the capitalist class. Generally, the other classes line up with the capitalist class, except in times of crisis.

Crucially, while individual capitalists have big power on their own – for example, a supermarket owner might be able to lock out dozens of staff and put them at threat of poverty – workers only have power when they band together, in trade unions, their own political parties, and other forms of co-operation.

So the question that you have to look at with a popular uprising is – which class does it represent? This means:

what kind of people are actually on the street, protesting? What class does the spokespeople and the policy-makers of the movement come from? And what power – apart from the power of physical bodies in space – does that class have to get its own way?

## Venezuela: the privileged protesters

For example, people who have a shallow view of politics look at mass anti-government protests in the Ukraine and in Venezuela, and think they're the same thing. Nothing could be further from the truth. The problem in Venezuela is that the United Socialist Party (PSUV) government has brought in more and more democracy and "people power" – and the capitalist and upper-middle classes in Venezuela don't like this.

Since 1998, socialist Presidents in Venezuela have been diverting more and more of the country's oil wealth away from the traditional ruling classes to the millions of impoverished who live in the *barrios* (slums) of the big cities. There's already been one coup by the right wing in Venezuela – which was reversed when the people from the *barrios* moved into action to demand their elected President back.

The current set of protests in Venezuela broke out in opposition to a rape on a university campus in the city of Tachida. Unfortunately, students at the private universities in Venezuela are extremely right-wing and anti-government. So what could have been a supportable protest was quickly taken over by an agenda to overthrow the democratically elected President, Nicolas Maduro.

The funny thing is that the people in the *barrios* are barely aware that any of these "mass protests" are going on. The ruling classes in Venezuela are not only traditionally lighter-skinned, but tend to speak good English, have media skills and know how to operate Facebook and Twitter. So they're very good at making

white people in the rich countries think they're seeing a real mass uprising.

But the crowds we see in the streets are overwhelmingly made up of rich, privileged people, and leaders of far-right parties, who shout about inflation and violent crime (admittedly serious problems) but are really outraged that they don't "own" the country any more. There is massive disruption and damage in rich places like the eastern suburbs of Caracas. If you go to the barrios of west Caracas, on the other hand, they hardly even know that anything's going on.

## Democrats against democracy

Socialists don't necessarily define democracy as "one person, one vote". Democracy for socialists means political power in the hands of the broad masses, not in the hands of the people who own businesses, land and media outlets. So, no matter whether free speech or free elections exist in a country, if inequality means that the wishes of a billionaire or the prejudices of a TV network outweigh the wishes of a million working people, that's not democracy.

The classic example of this in English speaking countries is the American "Tea Party". This "astroturf" (fake grassroots) movement was originally funded by right-wing millionaires to provide an appearance of a "mass uprising" against the very weak healthcare reforms of Barack Obama, and swing public opinion away from them. Tapping into the deep racism in the South and other parts of the USA, the Tea Party has brought thousands of older, white Americans onto the streets to scream about the "fascist", "socialist" or even "Satanic" agenda of the centre-right Obama administration. It's so successful that it's become a real mass movement among the traditional middle classes of the white USA, and is threatening to take control of the Republican Party itself. Things get even wilder when you look

at the "Yellow Shirt" movement in Thailand, which has recently forced their government to call a snap election. The Yellow Shirts' official name is the People's Alliance for Democracy. But they don't even want right-wing capitalist democracy. What they want is an unelected council of business people and academics to take over, because they don't think the Thai masses can be trusted with power – since they keep electing the populist party of exiled millionaire Thaksin Shinawatra, whose current leader and Prime Minister is his sister Yingluck.

In Egypt, a real mass uprising of the urban and rural middle and lower classes drove out the dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak in February 2011. But the liberal middle classes were disgusted when Mohammed Morsi – the candidate aligned to the *Ikhwan* (Muslim Brotherhood), supported by the rural poor – won the following election. Screaming about "dictatorship", they appealed to Western Islamophobia by smearing the moderately Islamist *Ikhwan* as terrorists.

The middle classes in Cairo – again, the people who spoke English or French and had good media skills – took to the streets as the *Tamarod* (Rebellion) movement. This movement managed to paralyse the country until the military staged a coup in June 2013, arrested President Morsi and took power themselves. Sadly, many socialists and democrats – even in Egypt – supported the coup because they didn't approve of Morsi's conservative programme. Now they seem increasingly likely to be stuck with military strongman General Abdul-Fattah el-Sisi as the leader of a dictatorship which stays friendly with Israel and the West. Meet the new Mubarak, same as the old one.

When it comes to right-wing movements based on the capitalist class and the upper-middle classes, when they say "democracy" they mean the opposite. They want their own class to have all the power, and for rights and economic privileges to be taken away from the



# International

mass of people. These kinds of movement often end up supporting pro-market dictatorships like that of Pinochet in Chile – or worse, fascist or Nazi regimes. Pretend populists

It is so important for us to tell the difference between a revolution – a mass uprising seeking more democracy – and a counter-revolution – which can also be a mass uprising, but is in support of putting an old régime back in power, or taking power away from the people.

There are two dangers. One is that socialists might get duped by a right-wing populist movement into thinking it's a real mass uprising, and try to become part of it. Some of the more foolish segments of the American Left tried making common cause with the Tea Party in its early days, as the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists originally welcomed the coup against Morsi.

Back home, in Auckland the populist anti-corruption protester Penny Bright has ended up in alliance with the extreme-right Affordable Auckland coalition in an attempt to make the current centre-left Mayor Len Brown resign. But the people behind Afford-

able Auckland are the powerful themselves – Pakeha employers and property-owners – while Bright's supporters are a rag-tag group of people who're angry about the current system. No prizes for guessing who would take the power, if they managed to make Mayor Brown give it up.

But the other danger is that right-wing populists might invade a real mass uprising and – through being better organised, or by brute force – might shift it to their agenda. A good foreign example of this is the fascist Svoboda and Right Sector parties, who entered the "Euromaidan" protests in Ukraine and put themselves at the head of it by violently physically ejecting socialists and anarchists who were against the Yanukovich administration.

The Occupy movements were another great example of a populist project, with their rhetoric of the 99% against the 1%. Despite its clear anti-capitalist message to begin with, though, it wasn't clear enough to put forward a political project. Without a clear political orientation, many occupations saw a growth in conspiracy theories which deride

the working majority as "sheeple" and construct pseudo-scientific explanations for the enlightened few, in contrast to politics of collective liberation.

In such a situation, socialists have to stay with the masses. If the movement continues to have real mass support, they have to stay in and fight the intellectual and political battle for the leadership with right-wing forces. But if the masses leave, there's no point fighting over a corpse.

Whether revolutionary or counter-revolutionary, though, there is one good thing about all these mass protests. They thoroughly prove wrong the common saying that "protests can't change anything". The Australian state of Victoria – which has recently made it a crime to stay on a protest if a cop tells you to leave – knows this very well, as did the New York cops at Zucotti Park or the Chinese army at Tienanmen Square when they violently closed down protest occupations. Protests backed with the real power of an economic class which won't be dictated to any more can change the world. In fact, they're the only thing that ever has.



We need to be more critical than just accepting that people marching on the street is a progressive act.



# Capitalism: Not Our Future

A conference on struggle, solidarity and socialism.

Queen's Birthday Weekend (30th May-1st June)

19 Tory Street, Wellington | Koha entry



## Agenda:

### Friday 30th of May

5:30pm -7pm – Elections and community struggle (featuring Hone Harawira and international guests)

### Saturday 31st of May

10am- What is Capitalism? What is Socialism?

11am- Marxist economics: Crisis theory (featuring Mike Treen)

1pm- Tino rangatiratanga

3pm - Disability and capitalism

5pm- International situation: Crisis, imperialism, fightback

### Sunday 1st of June

11am- Education and capitalism

1pm- Workers from the margins: Key issues in contemporary workers' struggles

3pm- Gender and women's liberation

5pm- Anti-capitalist organising in Australia & Aotearoa/NZ

6:30pm- Closing and thanks

**Fightback** PRESENTS

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